

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 DODE-00 CIAE-00 INR-05 L-01
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R 171831Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0291
INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USINT HAVANA
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 2897

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MASS, PEPR, EAID, US, GT
SUBJ: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT LUCAS

SUMMARY. AMBASSADOR'S INITIAL MEETING WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT LUCAS MAY 12 WAS NOTABLE FOR IMPRESSION THAT THE GENERAL HOPES FOR CLOSE, COOPERATIVE RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. ALTHOUGH HIS COMMENTS REFLECTED UNHAPPINESS WITH OUR ARMS POLICY, HE SEEMED NOT TO CONTEMPLATE MUCH IN THE WAY OF FOREIGN POLICY INNOVATION (SEPTEL FOR BELIZE COMMENT) AND HIS SEEMINGLY SINCERE INTEREST IN IMPROVING THE LOT OF GUATEMALA'S CAMPESINO MAJORITY FITS IN WELL, IF PERHAPS NOT IN SPECIFICS, WITH U.S. DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES. HE TOOK DIM VIEW, HOWEVER, OF PRESIDENT LAUGERUD'S PERMISSIVENESS ON THE LABOR FRONT, CRITICIZED THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION IN SEVERAL OTHER RESPECTS, AND MAINTAINED THAT THE RIGHT AND LEFT EXTREMES WERE OUT TO GET HIM. ALL IN ALL, HE LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION
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WOULD NOT DIFFER RADICALLY FROM HIS PREDECESSOR'S. END SUMMARY.

1. SHORTLY AFTER EMBASSY TRANSMITTED PRESIDENT CARTER'S MESSAGE OF CONGRATULATIONS, AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED MEETING WITH LUCAS TO TALK OVER PLANS OF INCOMING ADMINISTRATION. AMBASSADOR ASKED TO CALL ON THE GENERAL, BUT INDICATED THAT IF LUCAS PREFERRED, THEY MIGHT INSTEAD LUNCH AT AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE.

LUCAS SENT WORD THAT HE WOULD PREFER TO COME TO THE RESIDENCE. THIS HE DID MAY 12 ACCOMPANIED BY CARLOS TOLEDO VIELMAN, PUBLIC RELATIONS CHIEF DURING LUCAS' CAMPAIGN AND RUMORED TO BE LUCAS' CHOICE FOR PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY. TOLEDO VIELMAN SAID NOTHING DURING THE 80-MINUTE CONVERSATION. POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF WAS ALSO PRESENT.

2. FOREIGN RELATIONS. AFTER INITIAL PLEASANTRIES, GENERAL LUCAS AGAIN EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR PRESIDENT CARTER'S MESSAGE, WHICH HE SAID HE HAD ALSO CONVEYED TO MRS. CARTER WHEN HE GREETED HER AT THE AIRPORT DURING HER TRANSIT STOP THAT MORNING. AMBASSADOR ASKED LUCAS IF HE FORESAW CHANGES IN THE DIRECTION OF GUATEMALAN FOREIGN RELATIONS, FOR INSTANCE, WITH RESPECT TO CUBA. LUCAS TOOK A RATHER TOUGH STAND ON BELIZE (GUATEMALA 2861), BUT TENDED TO DISMISS THE CUBAN QUESTION, CHOOSING TO INTERPRET IT AS A REFERENCE TO HIS LEFTIST VICE PRESIDENT, VILLAGRAN KRAMER, AND REASSURING US THAT VILLAGRAN WAS THOROUGHLY RELIABLE. HE DID SAY IT WAS NOT IN GUATEMALA'S INTEREST TO TURN TO "SOCIALIST COUNTRIES," MENTIONING USSR AND PRC, BUT HE SUPPOSED THEY MIGHT AT SOME TIME NEED CONSULAR REPRESENTATION IN SOME OF THE COUNTRIES TO HANDLE COMMERCIAL AND ARMS PURCHASES. IN THIS CONTEXT, HE NOTED THAT THE GOG HAD GIVEN SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO THE PURCHASE OF RIFLES FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA DURING HIS TERM AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE. HOWEVER, HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT TIES WITH THE US WERE STRONG AND WOULD REMAIN SO. "WE ARE IN YOUR ORBIT," HE SAID, CONFIDENTIAL

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"AND I EXPECT TO HAVE MAGNIFICENT RELATIONS WITH YOU." HIS TONE WAS MATTER-OF-FACT, NOT RUEFUL AT ALL.

3. US ARMS TRANSFER POLICY. IN A TACTFUL, LOW-KEY WAY, LUCAS ECHOED GOG FRUSTRATION WITH US RESTRICTIONS ON ARMS SALES TO GUATEMALA. THAT, FOR HIM, WAS THE ONLY PROBLEM IN THE US-GUATEMALAN RELATIONS AND HE ATTRIBUTED IT TO THE BELIZE PROBLEM. IT WAS CLEAR THAT OUR REFUSAL TO SELL M-16 RIFLES WHEN HE WAS MINISTER OF DEFENSE STILL RANKLED; AND WHEN THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT WE CONTINUE TO SELL MILITARY ITEMS TO GUATEMALA, THE GENERAL INTIMATED THAT HE CONSIDERED LEAD TIME ON DELIVERIES TO BE EXCESSIVE.

4. AGRARIAN MATTERS. LUCAS SHOWED SPECIAL INTEREST IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRYSIDE. HE REMARKED AT ONE POINT THAT WHILE URBAN PROBLEMS RECEIVED HEAVY PUBLICITY, IT WAS WELL TO REMEMBER THAT TWO-THIRDS OF GUATEMALA'S POPULATION IS RURAL. ON WHETHER HE WOULD CONTINUE THE LAUGERUD GOVERNMENT'S EMPHASIS ON COOPERATIVES, LUCAS SAID YES, BUT IMPLICITLY CRITICIZED THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION'S PROGRAM IN THIS AREA AS INEFFICIENT AND PERHAPS CORRUPT. HE MAINTAINED THAT 25 MILLION DOLLARS IN DISBURSEMENTS FOR THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT HAD NOT BEEN USED

PRODUCTIVELY. LUCAS RAISED THE QUESTION OF DELAYS ENCOUNTERED IN IMPLEMENTING AN AID LOAN FOR COLONIZATION OF A LARGE TRACT IN THE NORTHERN TRANSVERSAL AREA OF ALTA VERAPAZ DEPARTMENT. AID DISBURSEMENTS HAVE BEEN HELD UP BECAUSE OF FAILURE OF THE AGRICULTURAL AUTHORITIES TO AGREE UPON AN ACCEPTABLE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN. MEANWHILE, THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF NON-CAMPESINO OUTSIDERS, INCLUDING MILITARY OFFICERS, GRABBING PARCELS IN THE SAME AREA. LUCAS SEEMED AWARE OF ALL THIS. HE VOLUNTEERED THAT HE WOULD SEE TO IT THAT INTERLOPERS NOT BE PERMITTED IN THE TRACT RESERVED FOR THE COLONIZATION PROJECT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GUATEMALA 2897

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5. LUCAS OFFERED SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS OF HIS OWN ABOUT IMPROVING CONDITIONS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. ONE SUCH WOULD BE A PILOT PROJECT CONVERTING THE MILITARY GARRISON INSTALLATIONS IN SANTA CRUZ DEL QUICHE (IN THE PROCESS OF BEING TRANSFERRED TO HUEHUETENANGO) TO A MILITARY-RUN NORMAL SCHOOL WHEREIN INDIANS WOULD BE INSTRUCTED TO TEACH PRACTICAL TRADES IN THEIR HOME AREAS IN THEIR LOCAL LANGUAGES. HE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE VIEWED TEACHING ACADEMIC SUBJECTS AND SPANISH TO MOST INDIAN YOUTH AS A WASTE OF TIME AND RESOURCES. LUCAS WAS ALSO CRITICAL OF THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY WITH RESPECT TO IMPORTING SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS OF BASIC GRAINS AS A HEDGE AGAINST CROP SHORTFALLS. FREQUENTLY THE CAMPESINO FINDS NO BUYERS FOR HIS CROP, BEING TOLD SILO CAPACITY IS TAKEN UP WITH IMPORTED GRAIN. HE SAW THIS AS REDUCING PRODUCTION INCENTIVES.

6. LABOR MATTERS. LUCAS CRITICIZED THE LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION FOR "TEMPORIZING" WITH LABOR, PARTICULARLY THE PUBLIC SECTOR. LAUGERUD'S PRE-ELECTION CONCESSIONS TO GOVERNMENT WORKERS HAD, TO SOME EXTENT, MORTGAGED THE FUTURE. HE, LUCAS, WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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VINCE THAT THE CURRENT ILLEGAL MUNICIPAL AND HOSPITAL STRIKES WERE INSTIGATED BY THE MLN AND FUR LEADER COLOM. LUCAS WOULD SIT DOWN WITH LABOR LEADERS ("EVEN AT RISK TO MY LIVER") AND CONVINCE THEM THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT PAY OUT MORE THAN IT CAN AFFORD. HE WOULD BE ADAMANT ON THIS, HE SAID, BUT RECOGNIZED THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAD A RESPONSIBILITY TO DO MORE FOR ITS WORKERS.

7. SHAPE OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT. LUCAS VOLUNTEERED NO NAMES, BUT SAID HE WOULD CHOOSE HIS TOP OFFICIALS ON THE BASIS OF COMPETENCE ALONE. FURTHERMORE (IN A VEILED ALLUSION TO THE PRACTICE OF THE LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION), THERE WOULD BE NO NEPOTISM. HIS DAUGHTER, FOR INSTANCE, WOULD STAY AT HER JOB AT SIECA (CENTRAL AMERICAN COMMON MARKET SECRETARIAT). HE DID NOT ENVISAGE RECONCILIATION OR COLLABORATION WITH THE MLN, AND LAUNCHED INTO A LONG EXPLANATION OF HOW MLN FRAUD HAD ALMOST COST HIM THE ELECTION. THE MLN AND THE FAR LEFT WOULD DO ANYTHING TO SABOTAGE HIS GOVERNMENT. IT WAS, ACCORDING TO LUCAS, A CASE OF THE EXTREMES CONVERGING. LUCAS WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO PRAISE VILLAGRAN KRAMER. HE WANTED US TO KNOW THAT VILLAGRAN WAS NOT A COMMUNIST, AN ASSERTION ATTESTED TO BY THE FACT THAT VILLAGRAN IS AN EVANGELICAL PASTOR. HE CHARACTERIZED HIS VICE PRESIDENT-TO-BE AS HONEST AND BY NATURE CONCILIATORY.

8. COMMENT. LUCAS, WHO REPORTEDLY RESENTED US ARMS POLICY MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE WHEN HE WAS MINISTER OF DEFENSE, HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN EASY TO DEAL WITH. NEVERTHELESS, HIS UNSOLICITED APPEARANCE TO WELCOME MRS. CARTER, HIS ASSURANCE ABOUT VILLAGRAN, AND HIS WARM, OPEN MANNER DURING THIS LONG CONVERSATION ADD UP, IN OUR VIEW, TO A DEEP APPRECIATION OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE (THE ONLY ONE TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE PRESS HERE) AND A DESIRE TO SEE RELATIONS WITH THE USG AND THIS MISSION GET OFF TO A GOOD START. WHILE HE STILL BETRAYS SOME CONFIDENTIAL

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BITTERNESS ABOUT OUR TREATMENT OF GUATEMALA ON ARMS, HE SEEMS GENUINELY CONVINCED THAT A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US IS A SINE QUA NON FOR ANY GUATEMALAN LEADER.

9. THE CONTENT OF HIS REMARKS WAS MOSTLY PREDICTABLE. HE

CLEARLY TAKES A KEEN AND VERY PERSONAL INTEREST IN CAMPESINO AFFAIRS, ALTHOUGH THE ATTITUDE WHICH COMES THROUGH IS ONE OF PATERNALISM. IT IS DIFFICULT TO READ MUCH IN HIS REMARKS TO PRESAGE AN OPENING TO THE THIRD WORLD, CONTRARY TO THE MUSINGS TO US OF VILLAGRAN KAKRAMER, NOR IS THERE ANY HINT OF THE APPROACH OF A MILLENIUM IN LABOR RELATIONS.

10. WE ARE PUZZLED SOMEWHAT BY HIS SHARPNESS WITH RESPECT TO THE MLN. IT DOES NOT SQUARE WITH REPORTS WE HAVE FROM PERSONS IN POSITIONS TO KNOW THAT THE LUCAS CAMP AND THE MLN, WITH THE PRESIDENT-ELECT'S KNOWLEDGE AND BLESSING, HAVE REACHED AN ACCOMMODATION.
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